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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended to help administrators, board members, and citizen groups plan facilities for the education of very young children. Parameters are set within which planners may explore a variety of flexible ideas to enhance learning experiences for young children as they embark on their first school experiences. Some of the basic considerations in planning facilities that are treated in the manual are: indoor spaces, outdoor spaces, ancillary spaces, transportation, size of building, and parent involvement. (CS)

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chil-dren's spaces

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DESIGN FOR THE 70's

PLANNING EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FOR

VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

PS 007130

The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Child Development
And Parent Education
Albany, New York

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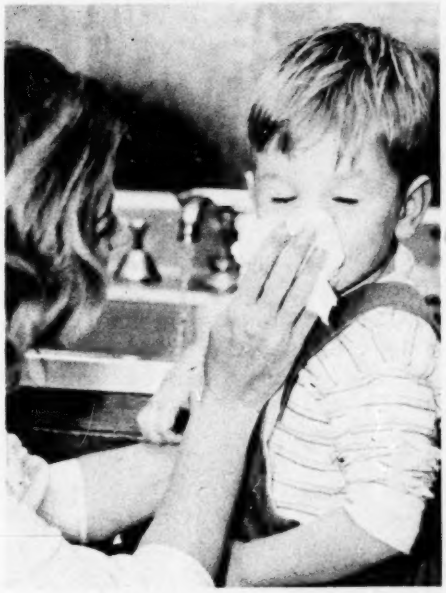
Thus a child learns; by wiggling skills through his fingers and toes into himself; by soaking up habits and attitudes of those around him; by pushing and pulling his own world.

Thus a child learns; more through trial than error, more through pleasure than pain, more through experience than suggestion, more through suggestion than direction.



Thus a child learns; through affection, through love, through patience, through understandingl through belonging, through doing, through being.

Day by day the child comes to know a little bit of what you know; to think a little bit of what you think; to understand your understanding. That which you dream and believe and are, in truth, becomes the child.

As you perceive dully or clearly;
as you think fuzzily or sharply;
as you believe foolishly or wisely;
as you dream drably or goldenly; as
you bear false witness or tell the
truth - thus a child learns.

Frederick J. Moffitt
Former Associate Commissioner
of Education

preface

This brochure is intended to help administrators, board members, and citizens plan facilities for the education of very young children. Board members, administrators, staff, parents, and other community members have much preliminary work to do before initiating a plan to serve young children and their families.

Hopefully, this material will be useful to community and interdisciplinary groups as they study their own particular educational needs and make recommendations for indoor and outdoor spaces for children under 5 years of age. Rather than rigid rules, this publication provides a broad philosophical base which sets the parameters within which planners may explore a variety of flexible ideas to enhance learning experiences for young children as they embark on their first school adventures.

No one plan will fit all communities. No perfect or simplistic answer exists. However, some guiding principles, as well as some rules and regulations, should be noted in formulating plans for physical spaces for the education of young children.

This publication is the cooperative endeavor of the Division of Educational Facilities Planning and the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education. Particular appreciation is expressed to Bertha Campbell and Theodora Reeve for their contribution to the preparation of the material.

Thomas D. Sheldon
Deputy Commissioner for Elementary, Secondary, and Continuing Education

Stanley Raub
Associate Commissioner for Educational Finance and Management Services

Design for the 70's
Planning Educational Facilities
in the Elementary School
for
Very Young Children

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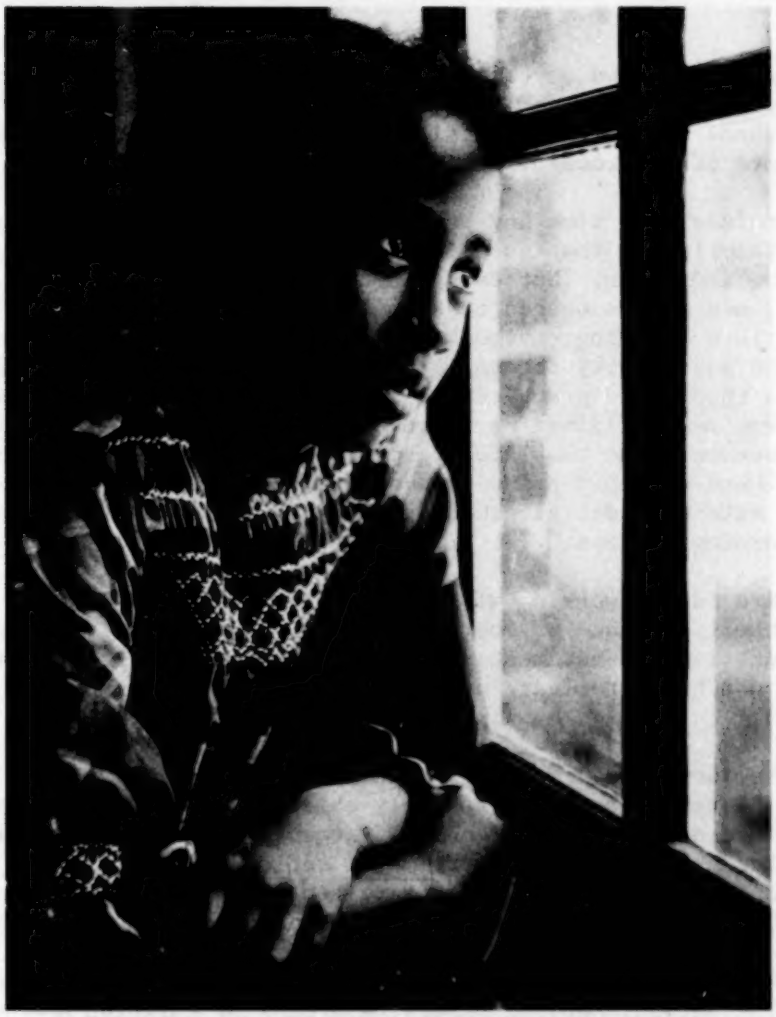


why current interest

Early Childhood Rediscovered

Schools, it has been said, are only places for learning. Louis Kahn expressed this thought when he wrote that the first school began when one man, who did not know he was a teacher, sat under a tree and shared his realization with some people who did not know they were students. (Young Children, April 1964, page 144.) This philosophy emphasizes that interaction among people is more important than the physical space where that interaction takes place.

Philosophically, we may accept the premise that "school" can be a log with a person at each end. Reality dictates some physical structure beyond the shade of a tree or a fallen log. This brochure explores the basic elements of environments suitable for the younger children.

Much professional time and energy have been spent developing a variety of theories on the educational needs of young children based on how they grow and learn. Not enough attention has been paid to the kinds of buildings and spaces needed to translate these philosophical thoughts into appropriate learning environments. Broadly stated, guidelines which provide ample possibility for variations should help educators bridge the gulf between theory and practice regardless of whether the contemplated facilities are new buildings or remodeled structures. There is no one perfect structure -- no template to be reproduced for all early childhood programs. There are only principles of growth and learning which can help communities make wise decisions about elements of space to enhance the teaching-learning process.

Sensitive adults working with young children have known for a long time about the importance of the early years. Until very recently, however, this was ignored and most programs were based on the premise that children do not begin to learn until they start formal schooling at about the age of 5.

With the increasing impact of work done by Piaget, Bruner, Hunt, Bloom, and others in the field of early childhood education, a new emphasis is being placed on early experiences. Investigation into the causes of learning retardation of children from low socioeconomic families reveals that the lack of performance is often related to experience rather than predetermined by genes. Bloom contends that by the time a child is 3 years old he has already developed about one-half his learning style. This has led educators to the decisions that for many children, especially those reared in deprivation, early exposure to groups of children and stimulating adults is not only desirable, but necessary.

New York State Scene

The term early childhood education connotes continuous learning experiences from birth to 8 years. For purposes of this brochure, however, guidelines for planning facilities are limited to the prekindergarten years.

Some school districts are now considering redesign of their total educational efforts for children and youth and are studying many options to determine what is best for their community. There is considerable interest in the British Primary School or Open Education, as well as in schools in the round, classrooms without walls, and schools built on many levels.

getting started

Careful study of the advantages and disadvantages of various plans will provide a basis for making wise decisions on the type of facility best suited to a particular teaching-learning style and the needs of teachers, children,and parents. Once the decision is made, careful plan of inservice education for all involved will focus attention on optimum utilization of the facilities.

In New York State, compulsory education begins at the age of 6 but 92 percent of the 5-year-olds attend kindergarten because their parents consider a year of kindergarten advantageous. All school districts make provision for children of kindergarten age and receive State support.

Permissive legislation passed in 1946 allows boards of education to conduct prekindergarten programs without State aid. However, thousands of 3-and 4-year-old children are enrolled in specially funded prekindergarten programs largely for children in deprived circumstances, including those from migrant families and handicapped children. This vivid expression of interest is evidence of a concern for the total development of the neediest young children.

The Board of Regents, recognizing the importance of the early childhood years, laid the groundwork for broadened public interest and support for prekindergarten education by issuing a Position Paper on the subject in December 1967. This Position Paper proposes the gradual expansion of State-aided prekindergarten programs to all 3-and 4-year-olds whose parents wish them to attend school.

Legislation passed in 1970 now makes it possible for public schools to provide day care services for eligible children. Day Care, once synonymous with poverty and welfare programs, is receiving much interest and a new status from middle class professional parents who have been made aware of the importance of early learning and from Women's Liberation enthusiasts who are seeking personal freedom from household chores and satisfactions from personal pursuits. The involvement of school in providing quality day care programs may be the single most important factor in providing the desired socioeconomic mix and preventing further ghettoizing of day care.

Review of Community Needs

The board of education is responsible for reviewing community needs to determine what educational programs should be provided for children under 5. Items considered should include

1. Number of families in need of services, with consideration for

   - migrant children
   - Indian children
   - handicapped children
   - children from minority groups
   - children from low socioeconomic families
   - children whose parents recognize advantages of the program

2. Ages of children to be served

   - 4's only
   - 3's and 4's
   - under 3's if legislation permits

3. Grouping of children

   - grouped by age
   - various combinations of age (vertical or family grouping)

4. Length of school day and school year

   - 2-3 hour sessions per day
   - a 4-6 hour day
   - an 8-12 hour day to accomodate working parents
   - a combination to fit the unique needs of children and their families who seek enrollment
   - a 10, 11, or 12, month school year

5. Determination of facilities to be used with appropriate indoor and outdoor spaces

   - existing facilities within the school
   - existing facilities within the community
   - renovated facilities
   - lease-purchase of relocatables
   - new building program

Involvement of Staff and Community

The board of education should involve the faculty, parents, and citizens in considering community concerns and should work with staffs from other agencies and departments who may also be seeking solutions to similar questions.

School staff and the community share difficult preliminary tasks. They must spell out their philosophical goals. They must describe a broad range of activities for achieving these goals, taking into account what is known about human growth and development and how children learn. They must make specific suggestions for the kinds of space required to meet these needs. Finally, they must select a school architect who will help translate their hopes and dreams for indoor-outdoor spaces into blue prints and reality.

Working with the Architect

Architectural and educational professions are going through periods of revolution in their attempts to provide functional, aesthetic schools while taking into account technological advancement. Both seem to agree, however, that learning is responsive, not directive.

Architects are placing increasing emphasis on functional structures. Educators are taking a critical look at the learner or process-oriented curriculum, as opposed to content-oriented curriculum. Both professions are recognizing the importance of working together as an essential ingredient in developing sound plans for early childhood facilities. Neither the architect nor the educator alone can find the best solutions.

An architect will bring technical information and insights to the planning stages: his familiarity with building materials, offering a range of choices depending on specific function; his ability to visualize and to illustrate two or three dimensionally what things will look like; his foresight in anticipating pitfalls and problems; his skill in making best use of existing terrains; his commitment to aesthetic as well as functional aspects; and his knowledge of how to achieve desired effects at minimal costs.

Architects are skilled in collecting data through observations of the program in action and through discussion with staff and community people. The responsibility of these people is to develop a program or a brief outlining objectives, needs, constraints, and related factors. The architect is dependent on the quality of the input from all the potential users of the proposed facility.

In some instances an educational facility planner may enhance the planning and building stages. He is especially equipped to help the staff and community to think through philosophical and programatic goals and relate them directly to their building needs. Architects frequently complain that school and community people are much too vague about what they want. Great plans can be reduced to nothing if they do not materialize as the planners envisioned them. As a result, architects have found it profitable to work with educational facility planners and to capitalize upon their ability to be specific in translating and refining a community's ideas into practical, definitive language. It is the specifics, not the generalities, which produce a quality facility.

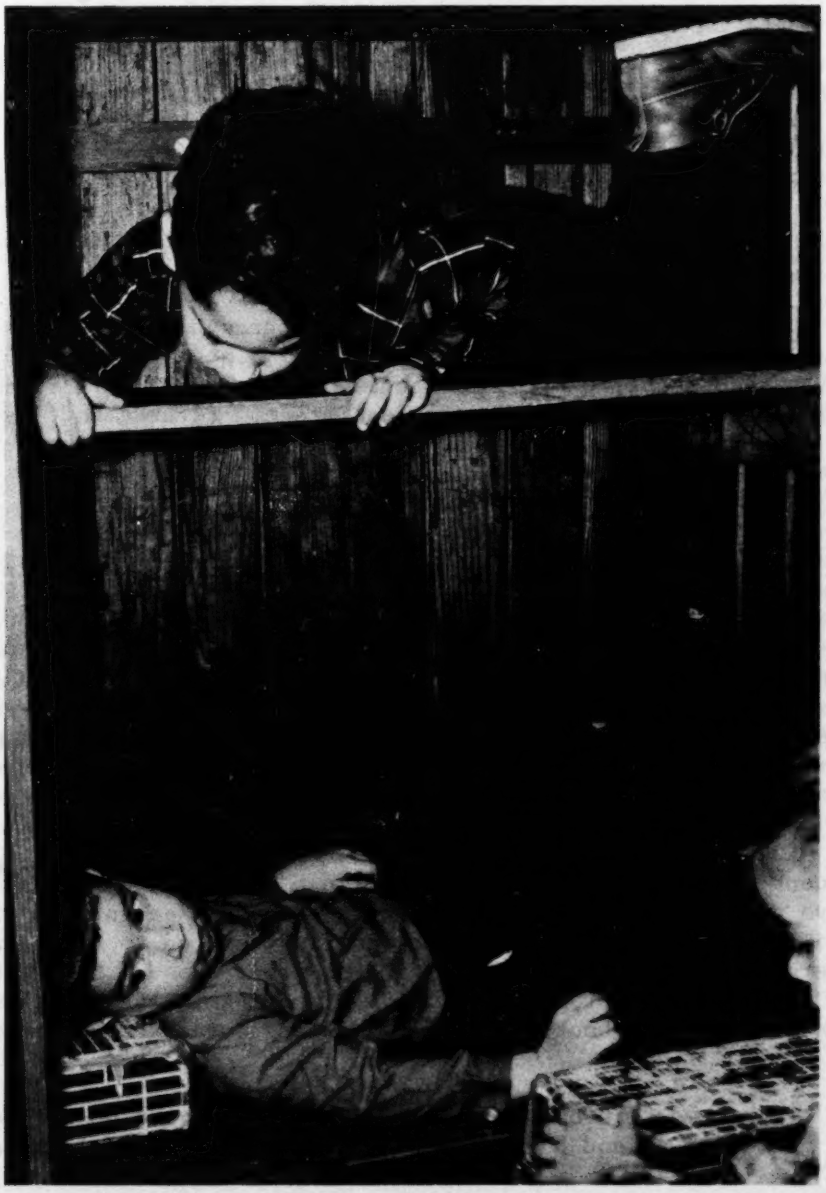
In recent years, architects have been much more anxious to involve prospective users of facilities in planning stages. Recognition of the importance of how children, staff, and families respond to a facility has led planners to consider many interesting possibilities as they endeavor to relate facilities to program. Joint work of architects and planning committees has brought about many brain storming ideas for consideration such as

- classrooms with open beams, so children can see what holds buildings up and how they are put together, as well as to

imitate the beam structure in block play

- see-through pipes to give children some idea of where water comes from and where it goes in this modern technological world

- exploration of vertical spaces with cat walks, second story nooks, or an upstairs housekeeping corner to provide additional spaces

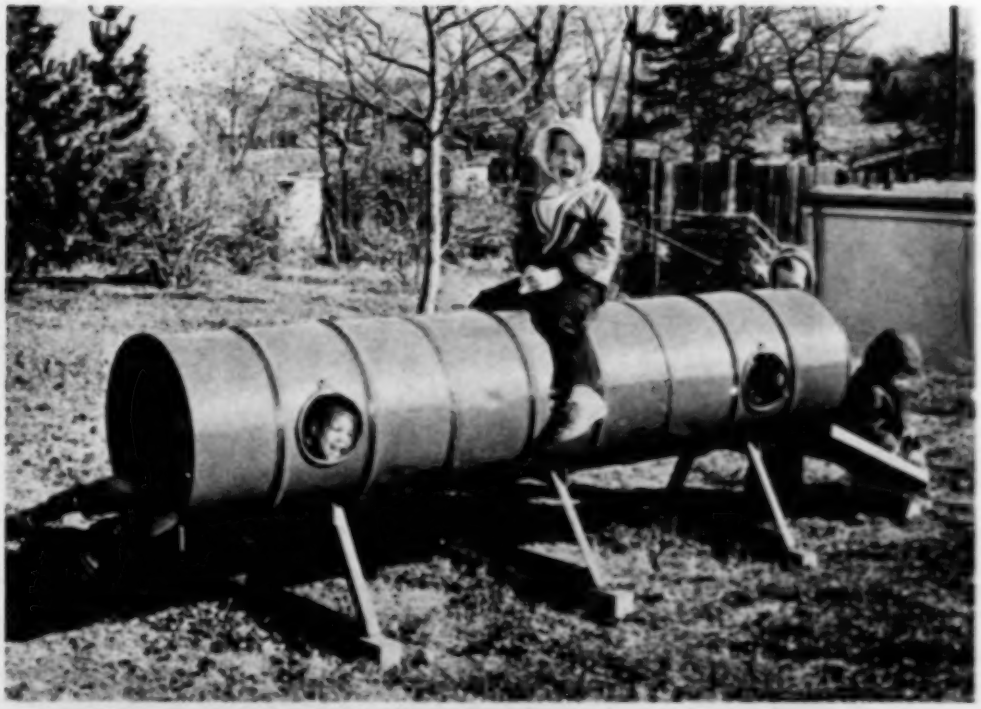


- plans which include spaces for animals, insects, and plants in their natural habitat to provide opportunities for increasing first-hand observational experiences

- water fountains, troughs, flowing brooks, and drain pipes emptying into tin, cement, or sandy or rocky containers to provide a variety of sounds, pleasurable experiences, and exposure to beauty

- inclusion of simulated homelike spaces in order to make the first transition from home to school easier.

The caveat to all architects is to be sure that the dreams of planners are fulfilled.



basic considerations in planning facilities

Philosophical Base

The young child is equipped with innate learning apparatus. He is his own hardest taskmaster as he attacks each problem with an avid curiosity, unbounded intensity, and an unending drive for autonomy and independence, tempered with his desire for approval from adults and peers. He is researcher - testing, trying, experiencing; a practicer - improving, refining, internalizing; an inventor - flamboyantly making up solutions, venturing wild "guess-timates," creating new words to fit his own meanings, making new conjectures based on past experiences. The young child is a mass of contradiction: sometimes hyperactive, sometimes sedentary, sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic, sometimes docile, sometimes aggressive, sometimes gregarious, sometimes solitary.

Learning is an active process. Observational records of young children are usually filled with a variety of action participles: running, walking, jumping, climbing, crawling through, hopping, sliding, skipping, swinging, rolling, rocking, feeling, fitting into, taking apart, piling up, knocking down, putting together, observing, examining.

Children are constantly in the act of becoming as they sharpen their ability to see, to feel, to experience, to perceive. School environments, both indoor and outdoor, should be spatially integrated to provide attractive spaces with opportunities for highly personalized, self-selected activities.

Schools for young children are learning laboratories for exploring their many interests. In planning the laboratories, wise adults must recognize that a child's environment can give information, ask questions, pose problems, suggest solutions, provide comfort, and define limits. Meaningful action and interaction between the learner and his environment results when that environment has been planned with emphasis on how children grow and develop and how they learn. Simply put, the child is a natural learner. Those responsible for planning environments will capitalize on his learning potential, respecting his individual style, pace, and interests.

The challenge in planning new facilities is to shape school buildings to foster the ever-changing, ever-growing cravings of the human being for more knowledge. Self-confident, self-controlled, self-propelled learners don't just spring up like mushrooms. They grow and mature slowly out of the nurturing provided by sensitive adults who recognize the importance of planning environments based on sound early childhood education practice.

Communities will vary in their educational philosophies, the kinds of buildings they plan, hours of operation, number and ages of children served, quality and extent of parent involvement, and ancillary services offered. But no matter how varied the programs certain basic principles are fundamental to sound planning. Although physical facilities are not as important as what goes on inside them, certain characteristics which promote quality programs will need consideration in the overall planning stages.

The Site

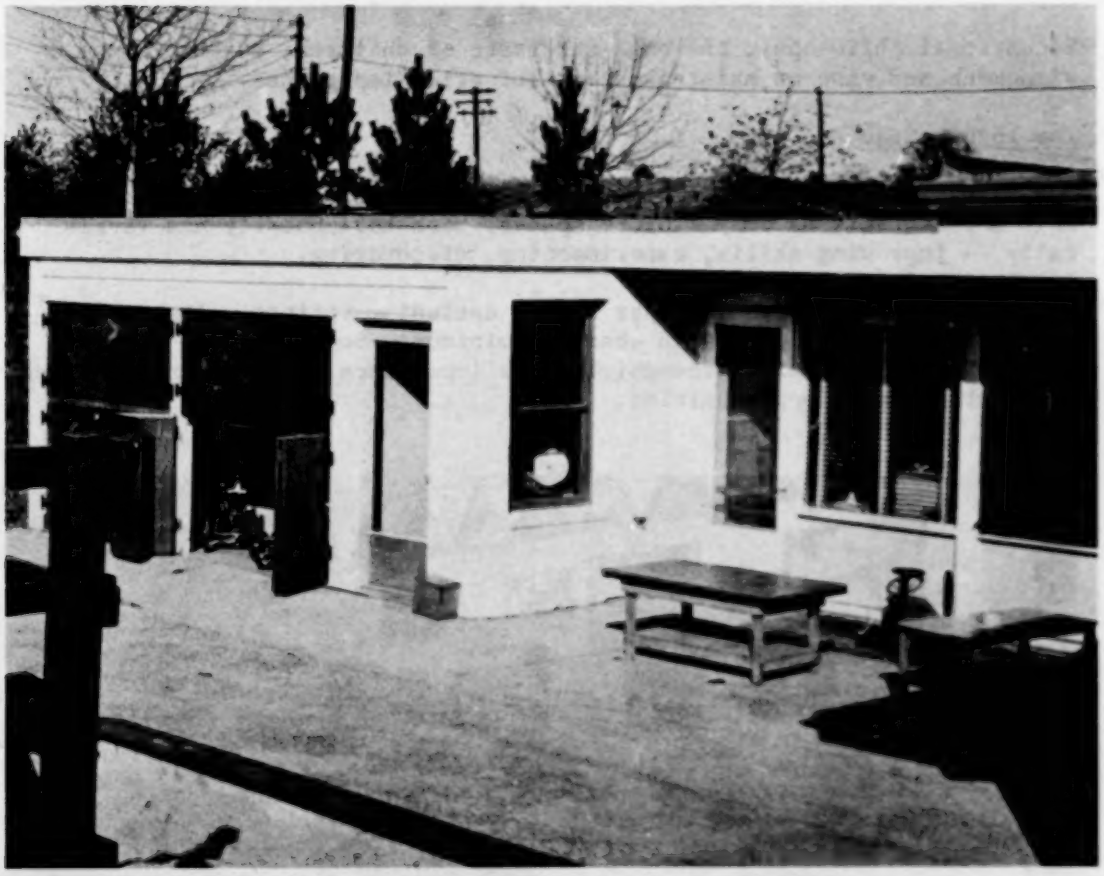
Some communities will have no choice about where to house their prekindergarten programs. They may have to use whatever available space exists. But if plans are made for including large numbers of children under 5 in school programs, a decision will have to be made on whether to house them within the elementary school or to scatter centers around the community in a neighborhood pattern.

A good case, based on sound educational principles, may be made for either alternative. Advantages and disadvantages of each should be carefully considered to insure tailor-made decisions suited to individual needs of each community.

Additional considerations in selecting sites are

- The location should be far removed from the hazards of fast moving traffic. Provisions must be made for safety of children on their arrival and departure from school, whether they walk or come by bus. A special parents' vehicle turnaround reduces traffic congestion.

- The outdoor play spaces used by the children should be adjacent or close to the classrooms. These spaces should include a variety of surface textures, such as hard top for wagons and tricycles, grassy spots, opportunities for sand and water play and a variety of exposures such as shade and sunlight.



The School Building

The school in the community was once a monument. Today it is a center for community activity on a full year, daytime, nighttime basis, serving the population from "two to toothless."

An old and still valid rule among early childhood educators states that buildings housing young children should be "close to the ground," not only because of easy egress for safety reasons, but also to provide optimal supervision of concurrent indoor-outdoor activities. Building orientation should reflect considerations of local climate conditions to capitalize on more favorable aspects of sun, wind, shelter, etc. With changing philosophies, as well as availability of many new materials, buildings for early childhood programs are being constructed of inexpensive materials with free flowing lines which take into account topography of land, availability of raw materials, and preferences of community.

Educational philosophy, the best interests of children, aesthetic environment, and ease of maintenance are of prime importance.

The Indoor Spaces

Since learning is an active process, young children need room to move about freely as they explore spaces, both horizontally and vertically -- improving skills, experimenting, discovering.

Thirty-five square feet per child, excluding toilets, cloakrooms, and storage facilities, is an absolute minimum. Some agencies provide up to 60 feet per child, recognizing the importance of space in providing rich, challenging opportunities.

The minimum space recommended for kindergarten and prekindergarten classes in New York State is 900 square feet. This allows adequate free floor space, in addition to well-defined centers of interest. However, too much space can be as overwhelming as too little space is confining. The advantage of large space, however, is that there are ways of limiting its use. When spaces are too small, the possibility of enlarging them is usually more expensive and more difficult.

As philosophies change, some school districts are planning open classrooms or rooms without walls. In a first school experience, young children need an opportunity to develop a feeling of belonging to a group before they are exposed to large groups of children. Young children especially need their own classrooms. They need assurance that they are understood and valued. The importance of close interpersonal relationships which develop as adults work with a small group of children cannot be minimized. This does not preclude the possibility of multi-age groups.

Group size is an important factor in a young child's first school experience. The size of the room does not automatically stipulate the number of children it can accomodate.

A rule among early childhood educators is that the younger the child, the smaller the group in which he is enrolled.

In general, these are the recommended group sizes:

Age of children	group size
- 3-year-olds	12-15 children
- 4-year-olds	15-18 children
- 5-year-olds	18-22 children
- 6 to 8-year-olds	20-23 children

Three- and four-year-old children enrolled in prekindergarten programs with Federal or State funding are usually limited to no more than 15 children in one group with a teacher and an assistant. A third adult, who may be a parent or a volunteer, is suggested to provide more individualized attention.

Classrooms have traditionally been square or rectangular in shape and formal in design. The simple fact remains that teachers continue to find these shapes more flexible. Movable shelves and dividers can make nooks and interest areas which can be easily enlarged, reduced, or eliminated.

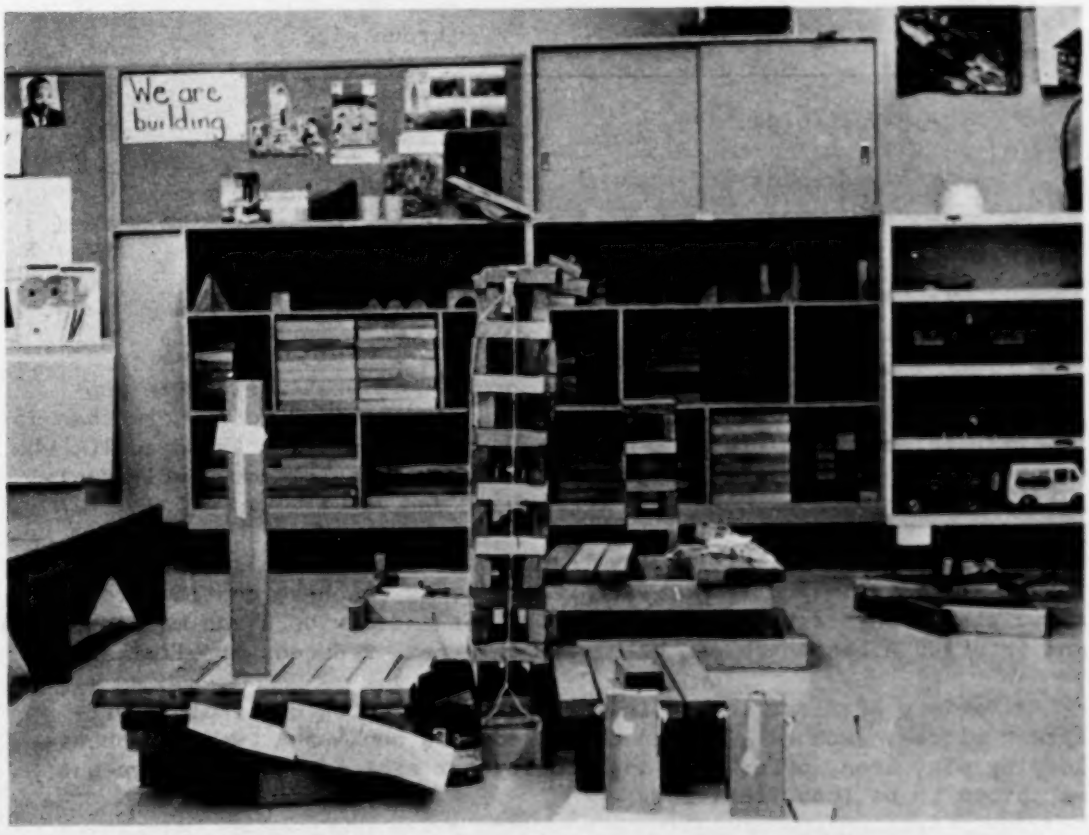
A variety of floor levels in a classroom is often desirable. Different places, such as a sunken or raised book nook or a two-story housekeeping play area, offer rich opportunity for exploration of spaces but may prove to be less flexible.

Heating and ventilating systems which provide consistent, draft-free heat at the floor level are important. Thermostats in each classroom provide flexibility in temperature control. Plenty of fresh, draft-free air should be provided. These elements should be designed with care so they will not become rigid barriers to future improvements.

Lighting, both natural and artificial, should be easy to control. Well-dispensed, glare-free light is not a luxury. Children are apt to use every available bit of space, and to choose their own light or darkened spaces for specific purposes. A variety of lighting environments is desirable.

Electrical outlets are an integral part of planning facilities. Strategically located in many different places, they permit maximum use of such necessary equipment as record players, aquarium accessories, electric fry pans, corn poppers, and occasional use of audiovisual equipment.

Acoustics are of special importance in early childhood rooms since young children are often boisterous. Proper attention to acoustical treatment and sound isolation will permit maximum robust activities by young children. Noise can be absorbed by walls, wall and window coverings, floor coverings, and special acoustic ceilings.



The importance of color cannot be underestimated. Designers will want to consider a balance between a few bright patches of color which sing and shout, and some colors which are light, soft, and mellow. Any paint used must be nontoxic. Children will add their own special touches of color with displays of their artistics. Large areas must be planned at children's eye level to permit ample "pinning up" spaces.

Since the world is the child's classroom, some large low windows should provide a full view of the outdoors. Whether the view is a city street, an expanse of lawn and trees, or a railroad, children will gain knowledge from their observations and translate what they see into their play. Some thought as to what kinds of views absorb young children may result in specifically planned exposures.

Floor covering should be easy to clean with hard, nonslippery surfaces in areas where paint, water, sand, and other materials are used and with carpeting or rugs in the housekeeping, library, and browsing areas.

To carpet or not to carpet continues to be a major question. The paradox is that carpets seem particularly suited to rooms planned for young children because they spend much of their time on the floor. But they are also peculiarly unsuited because learning is a messy process for the very young. With new fabrics impervious to stains and special cleaning compounds, very few areas cannot be effectively carpeted if the quality of the rug can withstand hard wear. A combination of carpeting and hard surfaces can be worked out to provide a warm, muted atmosphere in some spaces and opportunity for messier paint and water play in other spaces.

Whatever the covering, it should be attractive, functional, and easy to maintain. Floors should be warm, resilient, and noise resistent. Good use of floor covering can reduce the number of tables and chairs, since working on the floor comes naturally to young children.

Open shelving is probably the single most important feature of any early childhood classroom since it provides opportunity for children to view choices; it suggests combinations of different materials; it motivates children to try new things through visual stimulation; it enhances individuality as each child is led to some kind of personal discovery.

Built-ins can assure a wide variety of shelving in height, width, and depth. However, they prevent the kind of erector-set flexibility necessary for a good program. A carefully planned combination of minimum built-ins and maximum movable open shelves will insure the widest range of options. What is to be placed on shelves will determine their size and location.

Each classroom should be equipped with a large peninsula or island counter sink which is low, flat bottomed, and has a single hot-cold mixing faucet. This will permit maximum use by children and provide countless opportunities for all kinds of water activities -- scientific experiments, dramatic play, exploration of size, shape, and volume, and pure sensory pleasure.

Low mirrors at the children's level can be a tremendous asset to any classroom, not only because of the differences in texture and light but also because they enhance learning as children view themselves in dramatic play, observe and perfect their own movement, and engage in other mirror play. Placement and size of mirrors are important. Placed in a corner or opposite each other, mirrors can provide a wide range of visual delights.

Open lockers or cubbies near the classroom entrance provide individual space for outdoor clothing and give each child a feeling of responsibility for his own personal possessions. Cubbies should be at least 1 foot square and from 4 to 5 feet high to permit ample room for a child's belongings. A separate compartment for hats and mittens on top and for boots and rubbers on the bottom will encourage a child to keep his own order. The cubbie will also provide a place to store his personal treasures.

Toilet facilities located close to the classroom and outdoor play area should include a minimum of one sink and one water closet at children's height for each 15 children. Separate facilities for boys and girls are not necessary or desirable.

Floor and wall coverings should be picked for their ease in maintenance, as well as their attractiveness. A floor drain can be useful for easy clean-up. Good ventilation is essential.

Mirrors over sinks and storage cabinets for sponges and mops are important additions in helping children to become independent in meeting their own physical needs, as well as to assume responsibility for the condition of their classroom.

A toilet room need not be limited to a single function. Depending on its size and placement in relation to the children's room, it can provide an additional large, low sink to supplement water play. Glass partitions can be an improvement on the usual closetlike variety and can make the bathroom lighter, more attractive, and more easily supervised.

Sleeping arrangements are of special concern in programs with full day sessions or extended day care. A separate sleeping room is desirable, especially in long day care programs, to permit maximum flexibility in sleeping patterns. This room could have multiple uses during the day.

If a separate room is not available, moving and stacking some furniture may be necessary to provide space for placing cots at least 18 inches apart. To make best possible use of space the program should be planned to permit short nappers and nonsleepers to engage in outdoor or quiet indoor activities while other children are napping.

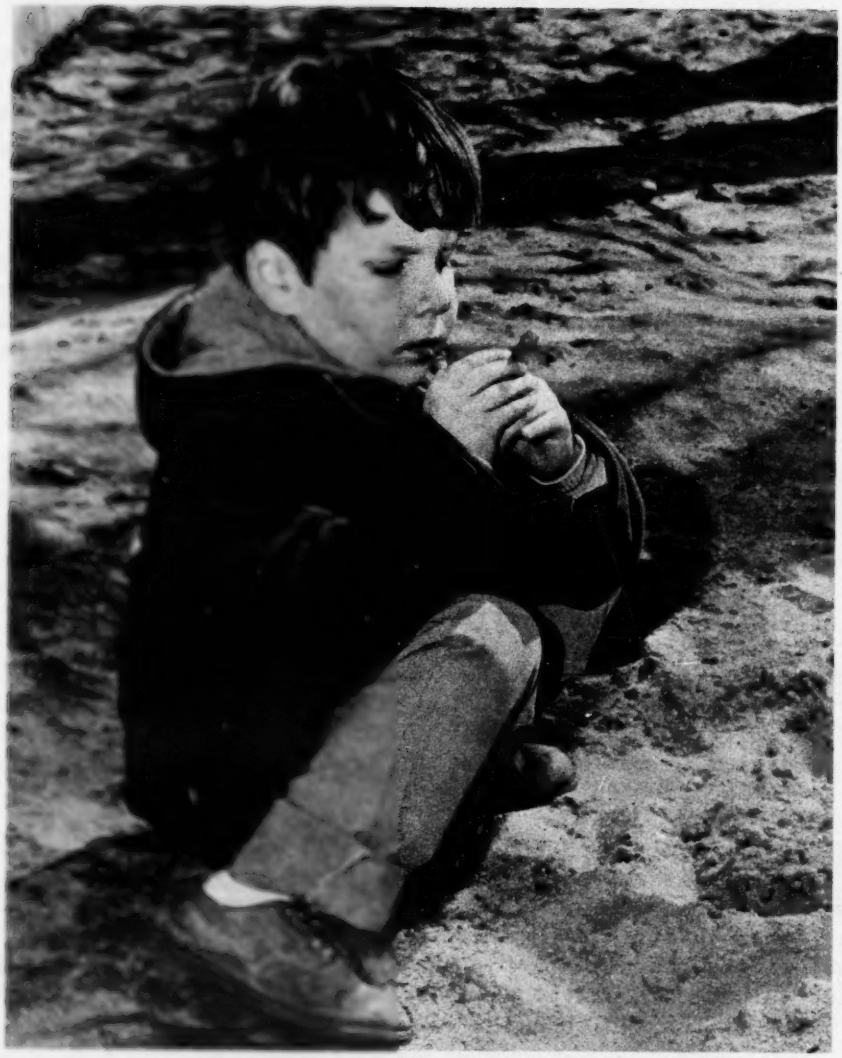
Kitchen facilities are an important feature. Being involved in food preparation is a learning experience for children. It helps them understand color, size, shapes, numbers, texture, and density, and often encourages them to try unfamiliar foods. Even if there is a large central kitchen, provisions should be made for simple cooking. A single stove-refrigerator-sink unit in or near the classroom is an asset, especially in full-day programs.

Eating does not require special facilities. Family-style meals are preferable, with five or six children and an adult eating together in their own classrooms, serving themselves, and engaging in conversation. This eating style enhances language and intellectual development and helps develop strong social conciousness in young children.

The Outdoor Spaces

Outdoor facilities are considered an integral part of the child's learning laboratory and are not limited to letting off steam at recess, or to concentrating on large muscle activity on the slide, swing, or teeter-totter. Outdoor spaces should be just as carefully planned as indoor spaces to provide a wide range of learning opportunities.

At least 200 square feet of outdoor space per child is recommended to provide the broadest range of activities. Direct entrance from the classroom to the outdoor play space is helpful.



A variety of exposures, such as shady nooks, sunlit areas, and a combination of interesting shadows provided by trees, latticed structures, and other natural or manmade construction should be provided.

Outdoor spaces have the added advantage of a rich variety of readily available raw materials which can lead children to all kinds of discovery. Careful planning can further enhance learning activities by providing grassy plots, digging holes, planting areas, hard surfaces for wagons and tricycles, and a variety of textures, such as different grained sand, gravel, cocoa mulch, and stones. Imaginative shifting of soil can provide manmade mounds, hills, tunnels, bridges, ponds with stepping stones, and other delights which provide attractive landscaping and natural fencing. Easily accessible water outlets are "musts" since water is an essential ingredient in sand play, digging, and planting.

Any stationary climbers must be carefully anchored to provide maximum safety. It is wise, however, to keep these stationary items to an absolute minimum and to put primary emphasis on those pieces of equipment which can be used in combination and recombination according to children's immediate needs.

Outdoor, like indoor, spaces should be organized around areas of interest with ample opportunity for a wide range of choices. Thoughtful planning is needed to keep fast-moving wagons and tricycle paths away from digging and planting areas; shady browsing nooks away from water and sand exploration; climbing apparatus away from building materials. Occasional relocation of outdoor equipment should be considered as important as rearrangement of indoor areas of interest.

A knowledge of prevailing winds and snow patterns can lead to placement of snow fences or other structures which will provide snowy hills and valleys and permit building of caves and snow tunnels during winter months. Some thought could be given to providing opportunity for children to care for geese, ducks, birds, rabbits, ferns, and sunflowers in their natural habitat. This first-hand experience with living things gives children a feeling of the life cycle and awareness of the world around them. A patio-like, hard surfaced area just outside each classroom will provide for outdoor activities on slushy muddy days with a minimum amount of restriction. When outdoor and indoor spaces are on the same level it is easier to move equipment and enables orthopedically handicapped children to be included in the program.

A health suite, close to the classroom and preferably visible to children through glass partitions, provides the quasi-privacy needed, yet allows children to observe what goes on while the nurse or doctor works with other children. This may relieve the young child of undue anxiety but simultaneously provide much knowledge as children gather and internalize valuable information for dramatic play. A toilet is an essential part of the health suite.

An isolation room which is part of the health suite should have ready access to the toilet. Provision for isolation of sick children can prevent unnecessary epidemics. It should provide visibility to keep an ill child from feeling too isolated.

An observation area is invaluable for staff, parents, and students so they can observe and study children with a minimum amount of distraction to the children. When not being used for the primary purpose, the space may double as a special project or quiet activity room.

Administrative offices should provide ample room for small conferences, interviews, consultation, storage or records, and space for carrying on the necessary business of the program.

A staff lounge where staff can relax, chat, or browse is essential. A brief respite in pleasant surroundings provides a breather from the intensity of involvement with young children and can restore waning energy and withering enthusiasm.

A parents room where parents can feel completely at home is a necessity. Provisions for parent activities within the public school takes on increasing significance in the light of new research which documents the importance of parent roles in developing or changing their children's life styles.

A room where parents can meet to discuss all aspects of the program, including planning, implementation, evaluation, child rearing practices, and their own particular concerns, in small or large groups will do much toward helping parents to feel a part of the school. An ever-ready coffee pot, an assortment of books and pamphlets attractively displayed on book shelves, a play pen and arrangements for the care of young siblings all encourage parent participation and make the difference between an empty room and one bustling with parent activity and interest.

Utility spaces are an important adjunct and should be readily accessible. If the prekindergarten facility is located in a large school, laundry, cleaning equipment, storage, and workshop areas may be shared.

Storage space is not to be dealt with lightly. It is crucial so "everything has a place" and also because it is important to give young children the concept of orderliness. Orderliness, in this instance, is not considered neatness, important as that may be. It is the beginning of learning about classification, making generalizations, and other categorizing so important in the total learning sphere.

Storage space for outdoor equipment on or close to outdoor play area is essential. Some storage structures on or close to the outdoor play area can double as a play house or climbing apparatus. The size should be ample to house all pieces of equipment. Proper storage will protect equipment from loss and destruction. Large double doors and a ramp permit easy access.

Ancillary Spaces

A special room for vigorous large muscle activities which are necessary to the growth and development of young children must be provided if there are more than three classrooms. This room may be shared since it will probably be used primarily when weather prohibits outdoor activity.

Some early childhood educators believe that programs for the youngest children belong in a small, home-like, familiar, neighborhood facility. The proximity is considered especially advantageous in involving parents in the program. Expensive transportation costs can also be eliminated. Proponents of the neighborhood facility also argue that the more structured formalized program of the traditional readiness-oriented school could encroach on the prekindergarten program. Conversely, a strong child development program could have spill-over effects in helping elementary schools to become more aware of how children are less dependent on formally structured curricula.

Other early childhood educators, however, feel that the elementary school building is the logical place for prekindergarten programs. They cite

- the importance of recognizing prekindergarten programs as the bottom rung of the educational ladder providing a continuity of philosophical goals and services
- advantages of having all related services and resources under one roof
- the increased possibility of staff team work because there is no physical separation
- the possible inclusion of teenagers and sub-teens with young children.

Whatever decision is made, resolution of the problem should be based on what is known regarding the needs of very young children.

Transportation

Long bus rides can compromise the quality of an otherwise good program. No child should be expected to ride on the bus for more than 30 minutes each way. Buses with adult supervision should be provided for the youngest children, unless a plan is set up for the same older child to assume responsibility for the same young child each day.

Parent Involvement

Parents are an important part of any early childhood program. Informal daily contacts made possible when parents bring children to and from school are invaluable. Visiting the school on a regular basis provides an opportunity for parents to see their own children in different perspective, to discuss progress, to raise questions with staff, and to observe all phases of the program in action.

Size of Building and Number of People

Young children can be overwhelmed by the sheer size of a building and by the numbers of adults and children involved. Careful plans must be made to provide a facility with an identity all its own -- a separate wing apart from the rest of the school, with its own protected entrance, outdoor play area, and administrative services.

summary

Young children will never learn more genuinely, more eagerly, more acutely, or more accurately than in the early years. Recent emphasis on the importance of early childhood education has led many communities to consider programs for children under 5 years on a wide basis. The Regents Prekindergarten Position Paper and the new emphasis on day care reinforce the importance of the early years and proposed plans for providing universal prekindergarten education in New York State. Inclusion of children under kindergarten age in public schools implies the need for long and short range planning for facilities to house emerging programs. Preliminary plans for building new facilities or renovating old ones must involve staff, parents, and the community in considering the goals of early childhood education.

Prior to any specific planning, decisions must be made on

- children to be served
- size of program
- scope of program
- location of facilities

Planning with an architect is crucial in order to consider a broad range of possibilities before deciding on the best plan to meet community needs. The finished facility should reflect the importance of children being in homelike surroundings with a stable group of peers and appropriate adults.

Proper attention must be given to all requirements mandated by the State Education Department's Division of Educational Facilities Planning.

Indoor and outdoor learning spaces for children and staff should be augmented by

- functional storage spaces
- spaces for supportive staff
- spaces especially designed for parents use

Knowledge of how people grow and learn will lead planners to give careful attention to flexibility, durability, safety, versatility, orderliness, comfort, simplicity, and beauty. The ultimate plan is to design a living-learning center which encourages effective, individualized programs.

A child's senses have been called his windows to the world. Through later retrieves, the child experiences his environment as he perceives space, texture, color and sound. The environment can enhance his learning or deaden it.

Schools seem destined to last longer than the educational ideas which generate them. Plans imposed in the name of efficiency often contradict the basic philosophy of the uniqueness of each learner. The dilemma which continues to plague planners is that the freedoms planned for today can become constraints in tomorrow's schools. The goal of planners is not merely to build a school, but rather to create a good place for living and learning.

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